

EI - 7071

**Port McKenzie Rail Extension EIS**

**Public Meeting**

**Willow Area Community Center**

**March 5, 2008**

**Jean Barry** – Willow. I think it's time that we really did get this rail extension project developed, not just talking about it. I've been to quite a few meetings regarding it and still feel the same way even after looking at everything. We really need it and putting it off and waiting isn't going to help anything. There's only more trains on the tracks. Where I live it's not going to make any difference for me because I live north of Willow and the tracks run right through our farm and so I see the trains up and down every day and so for people to get all upset that they're going to come close to them, it's no big deal. It's sort of neat. You watch them. They're just sort of a thing to talk about. It's no big deal. They don't need to get all that upset about it but to get that rail traffic so that it's not going through Willow, not going through an area where a whole lot of people live and directing a lot of it from here on down as it goes through Houston and then gets into Wasilla even where it's really populated. It just needs to be out of that area where the population lives and the logical place seems to be right where they're talking about at north of Willow, north of the Willow Creek, mile 62 I guess it is. As far as crossing some of these side roads or whatever, I'm sure the railroad and the state can make it happen so it's safe for everybody and at the time, I continue to hear or read things in the paper that the Willow community is against it and I don't believe that. There are some people in the Willow community who are very against it. They happen to be a musher group and they pretty much want to control everything they possibly can, to the point of even trying to control me using my own farm sometimes so I don't give them a whole lot of credit for their comments and things they make regarding that we shouldn't do it. That's pretty much what I have to say. It looks like what I've seen so far in all the plans, it seems to be well thought out. They're sticking to the high grounds as best they can and that seems to be the history of the railroad all along is stick to the high ground and get her in there. Doesn't seem like it should take as long as it looks like it's

going to. Didn't take that long to get from Seward to Fairbanks to begin with. That's about all I have to say. Thank you.

**Ted Barry** - My name is Ted Barry, Post Office box 49, Willow, Alaska. That's Birch Grove Farm at Kashwitna. I am very much in favor of the Willow route coming out of mile 73 of the Parks Highway. One of the things that we need to be concerned about is the future of Willow and the traffic that will come through or be eliminated coming through Willow by having that corridor. If the corridor is beyond Willow it's not going to do anything to alleviate future congestions for rail and highway traffic through this area. I don't have a problem because it's not going to have an effect on me. The rail goes right through the middle of our farm and the highway goes through our farm so none of these routes is going to leave anything for me as a personal gain. I'm looking at the future. What do we need for the future of this area? We need to have a vision and if it's not done now, it'll never be done. There's a silent majority in the area that are in favor also of this route. Many of the times what you'll have are the radicals in this area or the Willowbillies that come out and stomp their feet and they don't know what they're talking about. Thank you.

**Victor Stanculescu** – My name is Victor Stanculescu. Address is 9201 Blackie Loop Road, Willow, Alaska. My comments are pertinent to the site selection of the rail corridor, particularly the Willow selection. I am in opposition to Willow West being the rail corridor due to its impacts on the anadromous fish populations that inhabit the area on the west bank of the Susitna River. These waters flowing from the area between Parks Highway into the Susitna drainage are anadromous fish waters. They're renowned in their fisheries for sport and subsistence uses. The impacts on these fish populations, particularly in the vicinity of the Willow Creek State Recreation Area, I believe will be deleterious to their survival.

Additionally, that area, particularly in the vicinity of the Willow Creek State Recreation Area, has numerous archeological sites from the Athabaskan Indians that inhabited the Valley and in more recent times, the trapping and gold mining history that is present in the area in the forms of old historical trappers cabins, historical trail systems, and gold mining history and archeology. My third concern is that a rail corridor, a main rail avenue will impact the recreational trails, particularly the winter dog mushing, snow machining and ski trails that are part of what we call the West Gateway Trail System. This trail system incorporates historic trails that have been created by miners and trappers and then are now utilized by mushers in the form of racing, recreational and Iditarod mushers who train on these trails and use them as access out onto the Susitna River. I feel that the rail corridor will cut through a large number of these trails, making their usefulness much reduced for the purpose of training or running sled dog teams, which requires certain lengths and distances to be able to safely cross roads, railroads and through habitated areas. Again, I emphasize that I would discouraged the Willow site selection for the rail corridor and that these issues be looked at closely prior to making a final selection.

Thank you.

**Fran Agne** – Fran Agne, that's A-G-N-E and Post Office box 592, Willow, 99688. Well, I am really very concerned about this because I always think when something like this starts, it sounds reasonable in, you know, just two trains a day but I can't see it staying like that because it seems to me it's going to put in industries and all kinds of commercial activities and I don't think the majority of people really want that in Willow. Most people live out here because they wanted to get away from all this and it's very disconcerting to think we could end up in a really heavy industrial type area. I mean, I don't mean right away but I could see that happening and with the tourism, which I would think would grow since Willow is pretty popular. I have

concerns about that and also about the trails because I'm a musher and where I live there are trails but there's also roads and hills so I tend to go over across east of the Parks Highway to run my dogs. There's many, many mushers in this area and I know we've all got concerns about the trails. You just don't know how this will all end. You know, it always sounds reasonable at first but I don't think it is. I personally would prefer that it wasn't done at all but if it's going to be, do it well away from Willow. I mean, Wasilla has to be vying for the ugliest city in the country with that huge granite pile just before you get into Wasilla. I mean, I could see all that kind of thing happening here. If you've got trains going by and stopping and then you've got just all kinds of commercial activity and I think there have to be some areas where they're kept free of all this stuff. I think Willow would be one of them. I mean, for one thing, if they ever decide to build the ski resort, then that's more tourism dollars coming in and I just can't see that tourism and the things that are active here are going to match up with the railroad. I don't believe the railroad really cares. I think it's big business behind this and I believe it's going to – I'm not even sure if we're doing any good but that's my feeling. Thank you.

**Christina M. Owen** – Christina M. Owen, P.O. Box 891, Willow, Alaska. I am opposed to having the railroad and I'm opposed to all of the routes, particularly I am opposed to the Willow route because I live in the Willow area, whether that's the Willow route or the Houston North route. I spent many years in Washington State where they are turning the railroads into trails for people and I think we should be progressive enough now in the 49<sup>th</sup> state in Alaska to see the mistakes that were made in the Lower 48 and that we shouldn't duplicate the mistakes that were made in the Lower 48. I see a lot of mistakes made, Wasilla being one of them. It's a pretty ugly town built along the road corridor and I'm concerned about the salmon rearing areas, not just salmon but all the other fish and I think what's overlooked is it's not just the rivers. It is

the swamps in areas like this in Alaska that is rearing grounds for the fingerling fish of all different species and then when you bring a railroad in with all the grease, just a little bit of grease is going to effect those fingerlings and those are the ones that are overlooked because most people are thinking of the big rivers but when you talk about habitat, it's pieces of property that we don't even think are worth anything.

The swamps are actually the nursery grounds to not only the fish, but the marine mammals to the moose rear their young there and so I would not like to see a railroad come anywhere in this direction. I think we already have corridors that can be used and for the railroad to go anywhere on these seven routes – I'm not sure if it's six or eight routes that have been proposed – all of them I think are going to cause environmental impacts which the taxpayers of Alaska will end up paying for and a few businesses will benefit but in the long run it's going to be the state taxpayers that pay for the cleanup and coming from the Lower 48, I'm very familiar with the super fun sites and how much the taxpayers are paying for individual companies that have made fortunes. I am specifically against the Willow and the Houston North but actually I don't want it going anywhere in this area and I'd hate to force it on Big Lake and other people that don't want it. Also I think my feeling is what is spearheading this railroad taking place in the first place is a port that the Borough put in, Port McKenzie, which I don't think ever should have been put in. In it's location, it hasn't been able to support itself. I think a lot of people call it the Port to Nowhere or a Boondoggle and to push on the people of Alaska now a railroad to try to make something out of this port is taking one mistake and turning it into two mistakes. Another reason why I don't support any of the railroad options and routes that have been proposed is because I think the railroad is starting from a poor foundation which is a port which can't support itself. A lot of the trails will be impacted where people get out to their

properties that they've bought. I know a lot of people that have properties that will be backed up to various trails that have been proposed for this railroad or various paths. I don't think the railroad in this situation is just a very good neighbor, one, being a port that wasn't sound to begin with and second, it's going to take out a lot of trails that people moved here to enjoy. Thank you.

**Edward A. McCain** – Edward A. McCain, 28091 Deshkalane Road or P.O. Box 27, Willow. I'm curious to know what the Borough and the railroad are going to do about section line easements. There's one out there every mile and that one route is probably going to cross these section line easements probably 50 times. Right now it's nearly impossible to get these section line easements vacated. I would like to see the Borough go through the same process that they make the private individual go through right now for vacating these, providing them with equal or better access, even if it isn't buildable or there's no road in it right now, they won't let you vacate it. I would like to know who's going to pay for these crossings. I don't think it's right for the railroad to require the private developer or the local road service area to build and maintain these crossings, especially if they're not going to have any at grade crossings and the grade separation crossings were a million and a half dollars a pop in the T&H study. The railroad has had a bad reputation for allowing crossings. I don't think there's been any new crossings here to speak of in the Valley for close to 30 years. The T&H plan went for 16 miles without a provision for a road crossing. Are you aware of the town of Ferry up north of Mount McKinley Park where they've had a problem with the railroad for close to 20 years to the point where every Fourth of July, the town gets out and moons the Princess trains that go through and they don't do it because they feel the railroad has been a good neighbor. This is one of the fastest growing areas in the United States and not to have any new crossings kind of tells you

what you're dealing with there with the railroad. On this one route being 100 million more than the other routes. I think it's unconscionable that you can even consider it. A hundred million will buy one hell of a bunch of schools and roads and the impact on the moose – this area that the Willow route goes through is the winter area for the moose where the snow is tremendously deep and I guess it's all right to kill a third more moose every year when it's a third longer and as you go back to the east, the snow gets less and less until you get to Wasilla where they haven't had enough snow for the Iditarod for how many years. I think that's pretty much everything I've had to say. I probably will try to get this into writing.

**Roger Pursell** – Name is Roger Pursell and P.O. Box 512557, Big Lake, Alaska, 99652.

I'm also a city council member for the City of Houston. Basically we are in support of the Houston South route. In our comprehensive plan and design, this project was actually for the spur coming through our industrial area from Houston to Port McKenzie which is in our comprehensive plan. We've held the meetings for it. Our city has passed resolutions in favor of the Houston South. Chamber of Commerce has voted and passed resolutions for Houston South. We designed the area that Houston South comes through for an industrial park area including putting in one or two facilities for pellets in both coal and also in wood pellets and using the train to bring down the byproducts of wood, of logs and also coal to produce wood pellets and coal pellets so that we can produce an alternate heat source in our area other than going with fuel oil and also for producing an additional abundance of wood pellets to do heating in the Interior. By having the facility going through Houston, we can get an off-ramp in which case we can produce these areas here and eventually also build a small fuel solid waste incinerator and again, we're using the byproducts of coal and the wood pellets to take the facility of sludge from our solid waste facility, freezing it, grinding it and then incinerating it with a byproduct of steam to



produce also electricity in our area. Big Lake has been designated by the EPA as a water disaster because of the contaminants in the lake and also because of too many houses without septic or a solid waste facility. At any time, they can take that area and turn it into no new construction without an enclosed system. At this time there is no enclosed systems or no sewer treatment plants in the Houston, Big Lake or Meadow Lakes area.

Our goal is by having the spur come in creates an industry for coming development. We're already in negotiations and talking with one pellet plant area which will increase 100 jobs. Part of the lumber can come from the North Star Borough because they have 1.4 million acres that they've already designated for forestry. If we can't get enough logs from our area, we can ship them down by train to make the pellets. This produces income to the city by the sales tax revenue so we can afford to start working on a solid waste facility, which will be located in the same industrial area as the train along with the coal pellet plant. We have a small one already in Houston but we can enlarge it so we can then load it onto the trains and export it to the port to be taken out to the villages and that so we can start reducing the amount of diesel fuel in the area as an alternate fuel source but by using this, the byproduct that we have left over, we can use for injecting the solid waste into an incinerator. It all ties together to bring in enough funding into the city that we can afford to do all this. We designed our industrial area with this park for economic development with one day having the spur come through Houston South. That area has been set aside. It is in our 1990 Economic Development Plan and was signed off by the Borough at that time so we'd ask that the Port McKenzie Rail Extension be taken through Houston South, that's just our economic session. It's the shortest route. It parallels the fault line. It does not cross it.

We found out in the 1964 earthquake, which I and the family was here for, that the rails are easier than replacing bridges. It doesn't cross a single stream that has salmon in it for spawning. It crosses two minor wetlands areas, unlike the other routes which cross several more and rivers. It's shorter. It'll take less money to build. It's less wetlands. One of our concerns when we looked at the original project was a derailment and that was from human error and not from environmental but because it doesn't cross any streams and it has less area of wetlands, the possibility of contamination into the water system and into a spawning area – and Houston South is the least area of any of them. It actually has a better chance of cleanup without causing environmental damage. You take a look at all the factors including the cost, the possibility of a derailment, the cleanup area, it has less trails going across than any other route too for recreation. It does have a few trails for the snowmachiners but the Willow route and the Big Lake route and the Nancy Lake route actually has more trail crossings than the Houston South. Overall there's really – unless someone can show as from the city's standpoint anyway, why it shouldn't come through there, we really can't see a reason. I mean, we can see it being a positive economic growth for the city and a positive environmental because of less wetlands. It doesn't cross any faults. It doesn't cross any rivers. The jobs that it would create would create more housing and more economic development than the few homes that it actually goes by so we're totally in favor of the Houston South. We've passed resolutions and we hope you put it in Houston. That's our goal.